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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MNUC](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: THINKING OF ENGAGING BELARUS PRESIDENT
LUKASHENKO

REF: A. 2/17/2007 GEE/GWALTNEY E-MAIL

[1](#)B. 06 KYIV 4647

Classified By: DCM Sheila Gwaltney for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On February 16, the Ukrainians floated a proposal to extend an overture to Belarusian President Lukashenko in the hope of obtaining progress on Ukraine-Belarus border issues and cooperation in forming a united front against Russian on energy issues. The initial proposal included the prospect of Lukashenko joining a small February 24 birthday celebration for Ukrainian President Yushchenko with Polish President Kaczynski and Lithuanian President Adamkus at Yushchenko's mountain dacha, followed by Lukashenko making an official visit to Kyiv. Ambassador argued strongly and successfully against the proposal with members of the Foreign Ministry and Presidential Secretariat.

While the Ukrainians are still pursuing possible ways to restructure their initiative to make it more palatable to Western friends, they abandoned the initial proposal, will consult with Warsaw and Vilnius, and will lay down conditions for a Lukashenko visit to Kyiv that will occur no earlier than March 5.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: The immediate crisis was averted due to our clear objections and the united stance provided by Poland, Lithuania, and others. We will, however, need to continue insisting that Ukraine must push for genuine steps from Lukashenko, starting with the release of nine political prisoners, and not just the appearance of reform, to justify a bilateral summit. Based on past history, Lukashenko is unlikely to take the necessary steps and will scuttle Ukrainian efforts on his own. Endsummary/comment.

Giving Luka a meeting in exchange for agreements?

[1](#)3. (SBU) On February 16, Presidential Secretariat Deputy Head for Foreign Policy Oleksandr Chaliy asked Ambassador for a U.S. reaction to meetings with Belarusian President Lukashenko that the Secretariat hoped would improve bilateral Ukraine-Belarus relations. Chaliy said the Secretariat was considering an invitation to Lukashenko to celebrate Yushchenko's February 24 birthday along with the Lithuanian and Polish presidents at Yushchenko's dacha in the Carpathians. The event would be followed by a one-day official visit to Kyiv by Lukashenko, during which Ukraine and Belarus would sign five agreements.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Chaliy noted the five agreements would include the two most desired by Kyiv for years: official demarcation of the Ukraine-Belarus border and simplified transit procedures between Slavutych and Chornobyl across a strip of Belarusian territory (Note: Minsk's refusal to endorse these requests have scuttled previous efforts dating back to October 2005 to arrange a meeting. End note). The other agreements would

involve energy and consular/legal issues. Chaliy said Ukrainian officials would use the visit to press Lukashenko to implement steps to lighten the climate of repression in Belarus and implement democratic reforms. He also appealed for U.S. assistance to obtain Polish and Lithuanian agreement to include Lukashenko in the birthday celebration.

15. (SBU) Ambassador immediately argued against the proposal, noting that Lukashenko found himself in a weak position, without support from either East or West. The visit would only serve to confer legitimacy on Lukashenko. In order to even consider supporting such a visit, the U.S. would need to see Lukashenko immediately take significant steps on the democracy front. He argued that Ukraine's hoped-for deliverables, Lukashenko's agreement to allow the EU to open an office in Minsk and to support Polish minorities in eastern Belarus, were incommensurate with the enhanced stature that Ukraine would provide Lukashenko. In a later telephone call, Ambassador suggested that release of all political prisoners could constitute a significant step; Chaliy objected that the suggestion would be too radical for Lukashenko.

MFA: Worth it for bilateral and geopolitical reasons

16. (C) In a follow-up February 19 meeting with acting Foreign Minister Volodymyr Ohryzko, Ambassador used ref A talking points to argue further against the Ukrainian proposal. He noted that, outside of meetings in a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) context, the U.S. was aware of only three bilateral meetings that Lukashenko had had with heads of state -- with Zimbabwean President Mugabe, Iranian President Ahmadinejad, and Venezuelan President Chavez. Did Yushchenko want to be included in such company, Ambassador

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asked rhetorically?

17. (C) While Ohryzko admitted that prospect was not appealing, he claimed that Ukraine, in addition to the border-related agreements, hoped to obtain Lukashenko's buy-in on forming a working group of energy-transit countries that could work as a group to counter Russian pressure. Although Lukashenko was weak now, he would not change overnight; the Ukrainians hoped to work with Lukashenko to persuade him that he had options other than Russia. Since nothing would happen, positive or negative, without Lukashenko's assent, Ukraine needed to engage him to obtain progress on bilateral issues. Ambassador reiterated that Lukashenko needed to take a significant step in advance of the meeting such as releasing all political prisoners; in the absence of such a step, the U.S. would not hesitate to publicly criticize a Ukraine-Belarus summit meeting.

Presidential Secretariat backs down, changes tack

18. (C) Presidential Secretariat Head Viktor Baloha informed Ambassador February 20 that the Ukrainians had reconsidered their proposal and would set conditions for a Lukashenko visit to Kyiv. Minsk's latest proposal was for a potential meeting which would occur no earlier than March 5. In the meantime, Chaliy would first travel to Warsaw and Vilnius to consult with Polish and Lithuanian counterparts before traveling to Minsk to discuss conditionality. In Minsk, Chaliy would relay Ukraine's conditions for a Lukashenko visit; if the Belarusians balked, then the visit would not take place.

19. (C) Baloha repeated Chaliy's point that the Belarusians were feeling pressure both from Russia and the West and viewed Ukraine as offering one of the few avenues potentially to relieve the pressure. Ambassador again stressed that the U.S. and EU held the common view that high-ranking officials should not meet Lukashenko until he took appropriate steps

forward on democratic reforms and protection of human rights, such as the release of political prisoners. Were Ukraine to proceed with such a meeting without securing the release of Belarus' nine political prisoners, the U.S. would publicly criticize the move. Reddening, Baloha said he understood and would inform Yushchenko of the U.S. position.

¶10. (SBU) Ambassador called Chaliy February 22 and reiterated that the initiative and his trip to Minsk would not be a success unless he was able to secure the release of the political prisoners. Chaliy told Ambassador February 23 that he had a "small measure of optimism" that the initiative might succeed.

¶11. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Taylor